

## Inslee declares drought

By **ANDY MATARRESE** staff writer | **Posted: Friday, March 13, 2015 4:53 pm**

With snowpack at less than half of normal in Kittitas County and elsewhere, Gov. Jay Inslee declared a drought emergency in three regions of Washington.

Snowpack statewide is 27 percent of normal, according to the state Department of Ecology, and the department's forecasts call for little to no snow through the rest of winter and into spring, and above-average temperatures through the summer.

"We can't wait any longer, we have to prepare now for drought conditions that are in store for much of the state," Inslee said in a news release. "Snowpack is at record lows, and we have farms, vital agricultural regions, communities and fish that are going to need our support."

Thirty-four of the state's 62 watersheds are expected to receive 75 percent of their normal water supplies, according to the governor's office.

The declaration makes money available for addressing possible hardships from drought. The department, with approval of the governor, can declare a drought emergency if it finds all or part of a geographical area is suffering from drought conditions.

Ecology has requested \$9 million in drought relief from the Legislature, according to the governor's office. The money would pay for agricultural and fisheries projects and emergency water-right permits and changes to existing water rights, and grant water-right transfers.

"We've been monitoring the snow conditions for months now, hoping for a late-season recovery," said Ecology Director Maia Bellon in a news release. "Now we're gearing up to help provide relief wherever we can when the time comes. Hardships are on the horizon, and we're going to be ready."

Rep. Tom Dent, R-Moses Lake, called the declaration welcome. He represents Kittitas County as part of the 13th District.

"I want to thank the governor for recognizing we're facing severe drought conditions in our region and declaring this emergency," he said in a news release. "The quicker we can take action to confront this crisis, the more people we will be able to help."

The drought regions include the east slope of the Central Cascades, including the upper and lower Yakima (which includes Kittitas County), Naches, Wenatchee and Entiat river watersheds, the Walla Walla River watershed in parts of Walla Walla and Columbia counties and on the Olympic Peninsula, primarily in Jefferson and Clallam counties. Specific watersheds include the Quilcene-Snow, Elwha-Dungeness, Lyre-Hoko, Sol Duc-Hoh and Queets-Quinault.